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## A WHEEL-SHAPED STONE MONUMENT IN WYOMING

By S. C. SIMMS

While on a visit, in the interest of the ethnological division of the Field Columbian Museum, to the Crow (Ab-sah-ro-kee) Indians, of Montana, during June, July, and August, of 1902, I was told of the existence of what my informant termed a "medicine wheel" on the summit of a mountain which he called "Medicine mountain," situated just across the Montana-Wyoming boundary line, in the Big Horn range of mountains in the latter state.

Although I made many inquiries of the old men of the Crow tribe regarding the "medicine wheel" and its significance, I found not one who had ever visited it. A few of them had heard of it through their fathers, but they could tell me nothing whatever of it excepting that "it was made by people who had no iron." At different times I chanced to meet with two Sioux Indians who were visiting the Crows, and they also were asked about the wheel. After inspecting the diagram of it, which I had hastily drawn in order to make clearer the questions asked them through an able interpreter, each of the two Sioux drew a diametrical line through the wheel and, pointing to one half, said, "Arapaho," and then pointing to the other half said, "Cheyenne." Each one declared that he had not seen the wheel nor knew of its location, but had heard of it some time ago.

The information obtained up to this time being too meager to warrant an attempt on my part to locate the so-called wheel, or even Medicine mountain, I had almost concluded to abandon hope of seeing the monument on this visit, when I was approached by a white man, known to the Indians and the whites on the reservation as "Silver-tip," who had spent much of his life prospecting and hunting in the Crow country (in fact, he had been adopted when a boy by a Crow chief named Sorrel-horse), and who informed me that as he was thoroughly familiar with the surrounding country he could

tell approximately where the "medicine wheel" was situated. I therefore engaged Mr Silver-tip to conduct me to it. We left the Crow agency, accompanied by Messrs Green and Reynolds, on Wednesday morning, July 9th, and arrived at the base of Medicine mountain after sunset of the following Friday.

The ascent of the mountain, which was effected early the next morning, was laborious and difficult, owing both to the ruggedness of the line of ascent which our guide selected and to the snow-drifts which we encountered. After a climb of about five miles we came upon an old, well-worn trail on the north side of the mountain. Unlike the south side of the height, which is almost perpendicular, the north side is a steep incline, strewn with small fragments of calcareous material.

The summit of the mountain is not extensive in area; it is irregular in shape, being broad at its western end and tapering with a jagged outline to an abrupt point at the east. Within the narrow limits of this eastern end we found the medicine wheel as it had been described.

This peculiar structure consists of a large number of limestone slabs and boulders of various sizes. Directly in the center, or at what may be termed the hub, stands a circular structure about three feet high, of the same kind of stone, radiating from which are twenty-seven lines, or spokes, of stone leading to a well-formed perimeter (figure 4). Around the outer edge of this circular rim or "felly" of the wheel, at irregular distances, are the remains of seven smaller stone structures, all of which come in contact with the perimeter except the most southerly one which stands several feet away, although it is met by an extension of one of the spokes beyond the rim of the wheel. Each of these smaller stone structures is circular at the base with the exception of the easternmost, which is squarish and, unlike the others, has a covering of stone slabs and an opening on the outer side through which entrance may be gained by crawling.

Upon the projecting slabs of the eastern side of the central structure rested a perfectly bleached buffalo skull which had been so placed that it had the appearance of looking toward the rising sun. Resting on the rocks near the skull were several other bones of the buffalo.

Within the central structure, which resembles a truncated cone, there is a slight circular depression in the ground. This was carefully examined, as were the spaces within both the central and the smaller structures, but the search yielded nothing. Measurements showed the circumference of the wheel to approximate 245 feet.

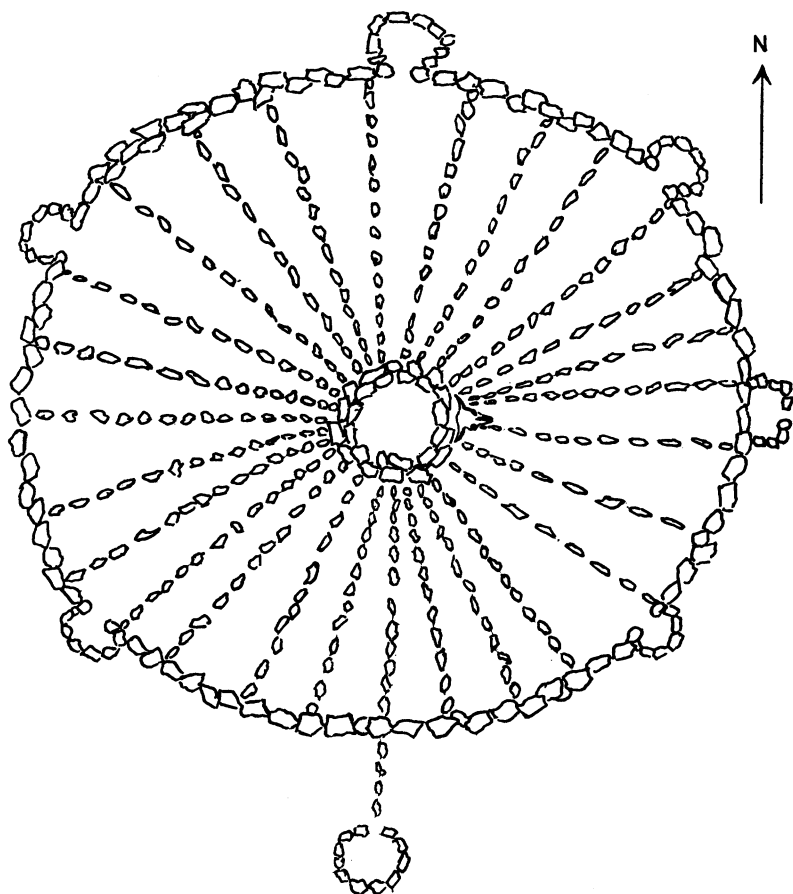


FIG. 4.—Plan of a wheel-shaped stone monument in Wyoming.

Medicine mountain doubtless attains an altitude of more than 12,000 feet above sea-level, for during our journey from the agency we passed several United States Geological Survey stakes on which the altitude is recorded, and the last of these that we passed before

reaching the base of mountain, which was many miles away and we were still steadily ascending, indicates an altitude of over 9,000 feet. From the top of the mountain an excellent panoramic view was had of the surrounding country of the Big Horn basin, including Big Horn cañon, Devil's cañon, the various winding streams, and in the distance outlines of the Rocky mountains were discerned.

From lack of definite information as to the use of the monument described, the foregoing facts are offered merely as an account of its existence. It is hoped that an opportunity may later be presented by means of which a more exhaustive investigation of the subject can be conducted with satisfactory results.